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SUBJECT: 57 JEWS MAKE THEIR EXODUS FROM YEMEN, RESETTLE IN
U.S.

REF: SANAA 1093

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Despite bureaucratic, logistical, cultural and personal hurdles, 57 Yemeni Jews traveled to the U.S. in 2009 as part of the special P-1 refugee resettlement process. The most recent group of Jewish refugees traveled on October 26 amid death threats from an estranged ex-husband and spurious rumors of a "hold" on the family's passports at the Sana'a Airport, barring it from travel. Approximately 143 individuals remain in the threatened Reyda community while 60 individuals live under ROYG protection in the capital of Sana'a. The Jewish community in Yemen has not reported any specific threats since June, but the rapidly deteriorating security situation in the country) including war in the north and ongoing al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula activities) could further menace Yemen's remaining Jewish population. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Since the December 2008 murder of prominent Jewish community leader Moshe Yaish Nahari in Reyda (Amran governorate), 181 Yemeni Jews applied for special refugee resettlement in the U.S. under the P-1 process. As of November 9, 2009, 57 Yemeni Jews (13 family cases) had qualified for resettlement and traveled to the U.S. (Note: All immigrants to the U.S. came from the Reyda community. None of the Jews from Sa'ada living in Sana'a under ROYG protection chose to apply for refugee resettlement in the U.S. In conversations with PolOff in September and October, Rabbi Yahya of the Sana'a Jewish community said that he and his neighbors lived in relative peace and security. Jewish children were granted scholarships to local private schools and the community worshipped and celebrated weddings freely. End Note.) Earlier trouble with non-issuance of Jewish passports was resolved by June, and except for a few isolated cases of divorced or separated women seeking to travel alone (illegal without the husband's approval according to Yemeni law), the Yemeni Jews did not face significant ROYG resistance during travel. One hurdle, however, was the difficulty Jews faced in selling personal property in Reyda; some Jewish families said they could not leave the country without selling their homes, which they said Muslim neighbors were not willing to buy because they were waiting to simply take possession of them after the Jews emigrated.

¶3. (C) The most dramatic case to date was the Sabari family's October 26 departure from Yemen. An estranged ex-husband of one of the female family members) already on the lam for killing his nephew in 2004) threatened to attack the family on their way to the airport and said he was having his contacts at the National Security Bureau place a hold on the family's passports, preventing them from leaving the country. Post contacted Ministry of Interior to request ROYG security for the Sabari family, who arrived safely in

the U.S. on October 27. According to Rabbi David Niederman, President of the United Jewish Organizations of Williamsburg, the Sabaris called their departure from Yemen "Yetzias Mitzrayim," an Old Testament reference to the miraculous Jewish exodus from Egypt.

¶4. (C) In addition to the 57 Jews who have traveled to the U.S., approximately 50 Yemeni Jews have emigrated to Israel during 2009. Post estimates that 143 individuals remain in the Reyda community while 60 individuals live under ROYG protection in the capital of Sana'a. Of those who remain, however, 38 are still active in the P-1 process and could qualify for resettlement in 2010. The Jewish Agency estimates that another 10 to 20 Yemeni Jews have also expressed interest in relocating to Israel in the future. (Note: Of the original 181 applicants who entered the P-1 process in January, 81 cases were closed for various reasons and five individuals were denied resettlement. End Note.)

¶5. (C) Yemen's less than 200 remaining Jews are in a precarious position. Although the community has not reported any direct threats since a menacing letter received in June (reftel), the overall security situation in Yemen continues to deteriorate. The sixth round of fighting in the north, which has raged since August, and accompanying rise of the Houthis, prevents any near-term return of the Sa'ada Jewish population currently residing under ROYG protection in Sana'a. In 2009, the fighting moved far south from Sa'ada into Amran governorate) less than 40 kilometers from Reyda) and could directly threaten that population in the future. Also, the ongoing activities of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) against ROYG and Western targets could further menace the Yemeni Jewish population. A misleading

Wall Street Journal article, entitled "Secret Mission Rescues Yemen's Jews," which described a U.S. government clandestine program to rescue Yemeni Jews, received significant coverage in the local media. The Yemeni media focused largely on the falsely reported clandestine aspect of the process. Coverage of the issue died down after a couple of days, however, largely replaced by new reports of Saudi involvement in the Sa'ada war.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) Yemen's historic Jewish community appears to be, if not dying out, scattering to diasporas around the world. As the community shrinks and the situation in Yemen worsens, the fewer than 200 Jews who remain are increasingly likely to seize opportunities to emigrate as they arise. Post thanks the Department and partners for significantly expediting the processing of applicants in the P-1 process. Post will continue to closely monitor the security of the Yemeni Jewish community. END COMMENT.
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